

A WASTE OF MANPOWER

By

William E. Sturges

January 8, 1943

SUMMARY

Today, manpower cannot afford to be wasted. We need every bit of it to supply our rapidly moving war industries. Any shortage of manpower just slows up the war program. The greatest loss of manpower is through industrial accidents. More men have been killed in industry in the United States since its founding than in all the wars in which the United States has been engaged. Due to such large losses through accidents, a more intensive program is needed in an effort to eliminate them.

A WASTE OF MANPOWER

Today, with the United States engaged in the largest war that it has ever fought, many of the problems that arise on the home front are cast aside and neglected. Most of the minds of America are focused on the fighting men in various parts of the world. Every day the newspapers contain articles which tell of their heroic deeds and actions; but where are the press clippings and medals for the men on the home front who are producing the guns, tanks, planes, ships, and the other essentials of war? Their job is just as important to the winning of the war as that of fighting in the front lines. In their work they face an unseen enemy, that of industrial accidents. These industrial accidents are greater than most people realize and are helping the Axis Powers in their war against the United Nations. In the last World War, "there were actually more workers killed and injured in the United States through industrial accidents than there were casualties in the American Expeditionary Force. ... When the Lusitania was sunk, it shocked the nation. Yet, year in and year out, as many die in industry, every fourteen days, as lost their lives on the Lusitania."¹

The bad part about these accidents is that they are not being decreased in number. In fact, the frequency rate in 1941² was 14% higher than it was in 1940.

¹ Stein and Davis, Labor Problems in America, Pg. 50

² Kossoris, Max D., Industrial Injuries in the United States During 1941, Pg. 1

This increase is accounted for by the influx of large numbers of inexperienced workers into the growing defense industries. The increase also indicates that safety programs and activities are falling behind the rapidly moving war program. Today, manpower is very scarce, and, hence, this loss through accidents becomes an increasingly important problem. The welfare and safety programs of the government should not be set aside for the duration of the war, but should be expanded as much as possible since they contribute indirectly so much to the war effort.

The accidents in industry can be attributed to three major causes: the unwillingness or negligence of the employer to provide adequate safety equipment; negligence or carelessness on the part of the worker; and the natural hazards that are common to any one industry. Accidents due to either of the first two causes mentioned above can be eliminated. However, those due to the third cause cannot be eliminated entirely. For example, no matter how many safety measures are provided, in the mining industry there is always the possibility of a cave-in or an explosion due to gases. However, the majority of the causes are personal and can be eliminated.

The employer is required by law to maintain certain safety standards, but the laws are too lax which is proved by the large number of accidents. The workers are very often the victims of an employer who has a thirst for profits and no

regard for their welfare. Accidents due to ignorance, fatigue, and carelessness are due to both the employer and the worker. The worker should be carefully taught the safest methods of doing his work and should be willing to learn them without being resentful. Unnecessary fatigue can be prevented by shorter working hours, recreational activities, good lighting facilities, and other similar things. The Jack and Heinz Company of Bedford, Ohio, is a good example of the perfect employer. All employees are given a special pair of shoes to prevent undue fatigue; free coffee, soup, and sandwiches are served during working hours; free dental and medical care is provided; and music is played in the plant while the men work.³ Working for such a company is a pleasure.

Industrial accidents prove to be very costly every year. Not only are so many working days lost each year, but deaths and permanent disabilities result is a loss of manpower in the years that follow. "All types of injuries taken together cause an annual loss of time of more than 280,000,000 working days."⁴

Contrary to the belief of most people, it is the workers in the lower age group who receive the majority of injuries.⁵

³ March of Time Radio Program, Dec. 24, 1942.

⁴ Bowers and Rowntree, Economics for Engineers, Pg. 502

⁵ Kossoris, Max D., Relation of Age to Industrial Injuries

Such a killing and maiming of young Americans cannot be allowed to go on. Most of the steps taken so far are concerned with easing the hardships that result from the accidents. A few examples are Workmen's Compensation Laws, Child Labor Laws, Accident Insurance, and Health Insurance. Safety laws, laws requiring certain sanitary conditions, and the National Safety Committee are a few of the steps that have been taken in an attempt to eliminate the accidents.

The real solution for the elimination of these accidents lies in stronger and more forceful safety laws and in a nation wide program of safety. Such a program should educate not only the employers and workers, but also the general public as to the seriousness of the problem.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

STEIN and DAVIS, Labor Problems in America,

Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1940.

KOSSORIS, MAX D., Industrial Injuries in the United States

During 1941, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Government

Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1942.

BOWERS and ROWNTREE, Economics for Engineers,

McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1938.

KOSSORIS, MAX D., Relation of Age to Industrial Injuries,

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Government Printing Office,

Washington, D. C., 1941.